
POLISH POLITICAL SCIENCE YEARBOOK

VOL XXXVIII 2009

PL ISSN 0208-7375

ARTICLES

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP – FRAMEWORK OF THE DISCUSSION

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1. The ability to manage other people's behavior has always intrigued philosophers. The fate of each human being and each community depend – in a way that is not easy to measure – on other people. Who are these "other people"? Why can they determine the direction of our thoughts and actions? What relation takes place between them, those who manage, and us, who are willing to be obedient? Which part of our social subjectivity are we willing to give up for the sake of these "others"? Such and many more important questions mark what may seem as an undefined framework of a never-ending, inconclusive discourse. However, once we decide to take an active part in this discourse, we need to take a responsibility to frame the subject matter, at the very least in a conventional manner, remaining aware that when each argument and each statement are equally relevant in terms of their content value, none is worth attention since they all are deprived of their explanatory value.

2. Above all, the reflection on leadership (political leadership) should be placed in the context of the historical and philosophical debate, which concentrated on an even more basic question, namely who or what creates the history of societies? Two answers are possible here, both of which have been covered in numerous works and the discussion of which is beyond the

scope of this paper. The first and the oldest answer makes us believe that history is a collection of actions of great people, who create it willingly and intentionally. The second answer states the opposite. History is a collection of natural processes; “great people” are accidental creations of regularity, temporal fates of societies which “objectively” take place, the above average qualities of these individuals are more an idealization and are assigned to them due to others’ expectations, dreams and beliefs. Clearly, adopting this approach can make the discussion on political leadership futile. The better option would be to – as in the Marxist doctrine – to refrain from searching for characteristics of people who shape the fate of societies, and opt for an identification of the characteristics of the processes that lead accidental people to adopt the role of the “pseudo-demiurges” of human fates. The correct answer to this question – if there even is one – is not to my knowledge. I am also not even convinced by the arguments put forward by the proponents of any of the two approaches. However, I do believe that if we are to analyse the problem of leadership (including political leadership), then we need to accept a mid-way solution, even if it is a minimalist one. Such an approach would allow us to admit that once in a while there are people with above-average abilities and personalities who, by aptly taking advantage of the existing situation or by creating it itself, take actions that are not neutral for societies and who, in the minds of these societies, are the creators of their fates. In this aspect, I relate to the words of Stanislaw Lem, who in his “Predator Race” wrote: “It is hard to imagine to what degree the fate of a society and a nation can depend on one person” (2006). Either way, silence in this important debate does not seem to serve well in the search for a more valuable statement in the matter discussed here.

3. The next step for marking the framework of our discourse should be accepting a seemingly simple assumption that what we understand as political leadership is a special kind of leadership in general. If we think otherwise, then we assume that there are at least two, different, social phenomena, of which only similarity is in the word leadership. When confronted with reality, such assumption does not seem correct, as the same person can be a leader in many unrelated social situations and for varied reasons. This also includes this particular sphere of public life, which we call “politics.” A statement that there are “universal” leaders whom we tend to classify as a “born leader,” a “skilled leader,” a “leader in every case,” or in “every group,”

or even a little sarcastically a “professional leader” would be counter-factual. At the same time, some specific features of different kinds of leadership seem to be excused by this situational diversification but also by some methodological aspects. On the one hand, one would like to know what features different forms of leadership have in common, if there is some common platform for their comparison, and if there is some general regularity for them to occur. On the other hand, obviously, researchers do not share equal interests and pay equal attention to all social matter, in which leadership can be observed. For example, while for a student of religion, spiritual leadership will be of most importance, for a researcher of culture, the phenomenon of cultural leadership will be more appealing. While the economists would be most interested in the “gurus” of financial markets, media researchers would focus their attention on the leaders of “public opinion” and political scientists would focus, although not exclusively, on the political leader. Thus, by treating political leadership as a special case of the **leadership phenomenon** – in general – we are obliged to define it with the reference to a *genus proximum* as well as specific criteria of the suggested differentiation. Another reasonable approach is not to limit the research of leadership (of any kind) to a narrow framework of personality typology but rather to analyze it at the macro-social level. Undoubtedly, leadership always appears in the context of a social relation where one of the subjects is an individual and the other is a group. Nonetheless, I would find little value for political science research to focus on “leadership” in such “small” or “basic” groups as, for example, a family. Such research, however, may become truly inspirational in cases when the second element of this relation is made up of multiple fragments of the social structure or those that are of particular importance for the functioning of the entire society.

4. The tradition of the discussion on leadership that has taken place thus far is of little value here. The probably most well-known typology proposed by Max Weber is an example of the neglect of the division criterion. The leadership type referred to in this typology as “traditional” is based on the later identified phenomenon of the inertia of social conscience (cf. e.g. St. Ossowski, 1967, R. Merton, 1982). The leadership type, referred to as “legal” finds its ground in the institutional sphere and today refers more to the characteristics of a “place” or “position” in a formalized group (e.g. bureaucracy). The leadership type, referred to as “charismatic” is a consequence of

possessing by those “chosen by the fate,” extraordinary personality features, frequently of a transcendental origin. In general, following this path, researchers in the search for sources of leadership would most frequently look **entirely** for those extraordinary psychological features, less often intellectual, of a given person or the degree to which the person reached the widely accepted, model of an “ideal” leader (cf. e.g. M. Ossowska’s reflection on “the model of a democrat,” 1992.) Such an approach is a result of a certain philosophical and historical tradition (described above) which assigns the causes of important social changes to the inventions and actions of “strong individuals,” “great people,” “genius leaders” (cf. e.g. Coser, 1977), etc. I do not think, however, that leading our discussion towards a very narrowly defined “psychological” approach (such as the ones focusing on the “will power” or the so-called normative constructionism, or the concept of a perfectly rational employer) nor towards selective phenomena from social psychology (e.g. the concept of the “expectations of the crowd” or the “social projection”) could bring the discussion on leadership any beneficial effects (cf. Wiatr, 1999). This is especially true in the context of the phenomena and problems that political scientists are currently rigorously analyzing and which include a popular assumption about the “crisis of political leadership,” as well as the phenomena of the “depreciation of political elites,” “fall of authorities,” “disappearance of national identity,” and “anonymous media indoctrination.”

5. Referring to the initial statements (point 2) and providing some contrast, it is important to point to two research approaches used in explaining the phenomenon of leadership. The first one are the so-called contextual concepts, for which I would prefer to use the term situational (cf. Żukiewicz, 2009) and which, clearly, although I am not sure if intentionally, are rooted in the Marxist tradition (cf. e.g. Berlin, 1994, Sztompka, 2002). According to this approach, individual features or a given social situation, especially changes in the social structure accelerated by some social movements, reforms, or crises, may “create a need” in a society for specific leaders. When such leaders finally emerge, almost as a response to a social demand, they are, to a large degree, created by a coincidence which forces them towards extraordinary actions and places them, often accidentally, in the centre of important, although independent of them, actions that determine the change.

6. The *Political Science Lexicon* edited by Antoszewski and Herbut reads as follows: “Different situations require different skills from leaders. In countries that are undergoing a process towards full democratization there is a need for a “creator”(…) However, when the period of seeking self-identification is over, then a new need appears for a leader who is an organizer and later a stabilizer” (1996:326). Nonetheless, this somewhat marionette concept of leadership can lead to many difficulties in providing reasons for the emergence of extraordinary leaders in times of a relative stability of a society. From this point of view, there is more cognitive value in the concept of leadership referred to as **interactive** approach. In my view, this approach is a particular version of the so-called subject theory represented by, among others, Buckley, Crozier, Burns, Giddens, and in Polish sociological thought by Piotr Sztompka and it is based on the assumptions of the subjective realizing of individuals in the course of different social processes. These individuals possess some socially conditioned, but also some assigned features, which allow them to more effectively enter numerous individual and group interactions. Thus, the consequences of their actions are almost a net force of “pluralistic forces” and different variables of the situation in which they actively participate and to which they have a significant “contribution” by using their superior position over other participants in the events (cf. Sztompka, 2002). With unquestionable merits of such an approach, it nonetheless appears that accepting the interactive perspective in the discussion on leadership is too generalized, too wide-ranging, not to say too broad in order to serve as an inspiring explanation for the reflection on a particular type of leadership, that is political leadership. Moreover, the interactive approach is probably better when used in the description of interactions between partners than in a specific situation of superiority that a leader has over his supporters.

7. Here, I will try to propose a “first step” towards a better identification of the subject matter. I believe, that **leadership is a phenomenon in the framework of group decision-making**, meaning a situation in which an assembly of people (a group, a category, an association, an institution, etc.) finds itself in an uncompleted process of establishing action goals (values, objectives), means of reaching them and choosing the implementers. I suggest referring to a group of people involved in these shared decisions as the “**leadership field**,” while to the essence of their decisions as the “**leadership**

subject.” Finally, to avoid the *idem per idem* error, while describing the “leadership field,” a leader, most generally speaking, is the person, who, to a significantly larger degree than others, influences the decisions made by a group. The degree of the influence on a group decision, which is “significantly larger”, is such an intervention in the decision-making process without which a decision would not be ever made, or, if made, it would differ from the proposal made by the intervening person to such an extent that a mutual agreement would not be possible (cf. Wiatr, 1964). Thus, a leader is not a person who effectively introduces minor amendments to a group decision, and not the person who cannot push such a message that would, at least, be in accordance with his/her intentions. Subsequently, **the strength of leadership** can be measured by the degree of the decision implementation of the subjects directly participating in the leadership field, which does not need to be, automatically, a measure of leadership effectiveness. The last one depends on the degree of reaching objectives (values/goals) for which the decisions have been made, and this can be unpredictable, even when a decision was thoroughly enforced. For example when a decision was not correct despite the knowledge it was based on. Here, we need to remember, obviously, that a leader in the proposed definition is a person not only in a leadership field but also in a given subjective framework of leadership.

8. Regardless of the above observations, it would make sense to understand the mechanism that allows for a creation of a group decision which is in accordance with the will of the leader. Such a mechanism is a phenomenon of influence. In my previous works, I analyzed the phenomenon of influence (cf. e.g. Pałeck, 2006). Here, with a small modification, I would like to remind that an influence is a special form of social dependence in which one subject (“I”) can make another subject (“W”) make – and possibly implement – a decision which content is determined by specific characteristics of the first subject (“I”). The relation of influence, as opposed to the relation of power, does not require any normative regulation as it takes place in the sphere of real conditions, independently of the sphere of obligation. In consequence, participation in this relation can be entirely deprived of an institutional aspect, and further, free of any kind of procedure and commonly accepted framework of competence (“sphere of competence” marked by inalienable duties and guaranteed rights.) Therefore, the subject

exercising its influence, does not use any means of force unless he/she is also given the means of power. An example could be a leader in an organization who is also its statutory boss. However, I shall return to this issue in the later part of the analysis. The above-mentioned modification refers to the problem of the intentionality of subject “I.” It is possible to influence others unintentionally and without taking any actions (e.g. the influence of painters on their followers). However, when analyzing leadership, such a broad understanding of influence requires some scope: **leadership** – in my view – **is always**, in a real and not normative way, **determined by intentional influence**. In this way, leadership, and especially political leadership, resembles the phenomenon of manipulation.

9. In defining the concept of political leadership we can refer to the concepts of the leadership field, the subject of leadership, and finally, the leader himself/herself. If we accept that the leadership field in a given society is marked by all groups whose organization and function are politically relevant, i.e. those in which decisions regarding capturing and maintaining political power are implemented, then, right away, one can notice that the sphere of action (influence) of a political leader are for example: manifesting groups, political parties, some professional associations, state and inter-state (international/institutions, etc., but not, for example, universities, hunters’ associations, housekeepers’ associations). Unless we assume that every public action is politics/politically relevant and believe in the principle that *everything that takes place in the state is politics*, which as Fredrich Hayek or Franciszek Ryszka warned has nothing to do with social reality or academic reflection and is rather an ideological excuse for totalitarianism (2003;1984). Hence, the phenomenon of political leadership, but not leadership in general, takes place only in one limited framework of a social structure and outside of it becomes only an ideological projection. And it is in this limited framework where it should be a subject of academic reflection. Lastly, ensuring the correctness of the definition of political leadership would require a precise definition of the concept of political power, which I will refer to, in a somewhat simplified way, below, while distinguishing between two phenomena; that of power from that of leadership. Here, I would like to proceed towards defining the subject of political leadership. By performing another necessary limitation, I would suggest that by such subject we always understand the program of shaping social order, which is usually viewed as an

“improvement,” a “reform,” or even a “destruction and rebuilding from ground” of the existing order. Less frequently, it refers to preserving the existing order. It is quite visible that we are dealing with a certain fragment and/or an interpretation of a broader group of opinions regarding the present state of the social order, the desired state, as well as the ways and means of bringing about – in the near future – of this more or less idealized state of order. The arguments to enforce new order are enforced by emotionally stimulating statements and symbols. Shortly speaking, the subject of political leadership is an ideology (cf. Wiatr, 1980). An ideology, and to be more precise, its content and way of articulation (expression), performs, apart from others, an additional function of a tool of influence. This also constitutes characteristics of political leadership. A political leader may rarely be a creator of an ideology he relies on, he may, sometimes, be its creative interpreter, but, he, always needs to be its propagator.

With some degree of simplification, we can say that a political leader is a life “carrier” of a given ideology, and if he wants to be effective, he should be associated with an ideology. It is not difficult to draw a methodological conclusion that the analysis of political leadership should begin with **an analysis of the ideology that is propagated by a political leader**, and not, as it is usually done, with the characteristics of the leader. By not belittling the importance of these characteristics for the effective exercise of influence, I would like to point out that the phenomenon of political leadership is **generated by the relation taking place between an individual representing a given ideology and the state of consciousness of a given community**, a state which has been created by the ideology which has been communicated to the community through numerous means and messages.

10. In concluding these remarks, which S.J. Lec would probably refer to as “unkempt thoughts,” I would like to, once again, return to the problem of the relationship between power (political power) and political leadership, a subject of many misunderstandings. Let’s begin with a basic statement that political power is a form of asymmetric social relation, whose course in an ideal and/or real way is determined by political norms. When these norms are broken (ignored) political power turns into an abuse which is not conditioned by anything but force (cf. ex. Arendt, 1998, Pałeczki, 1988). Simply put, political power is a normative-factual phenomenon while political leadership with its intentional influence, as I had argued above, is a *par*

excellence factual phenomenon. There are no social norms and there cannot be any social norms that would regulate the way of conducting political leadership. There are different models of leadership and different social situations that are more or less beneficial for fulfilling the leadership role. A situation which is particularly beneficial is a simultaneous control of political power. Undoubtedly, being a leader is a factor enforcing the effectiveness of political power. However, there is also a reverse correlation, which frequently goes unnoticed or is omitted. Both history and contemporary experience provide numerous examples of leaders (political leaders) who do not hold any positions in the structure of political power. Furthermore, they are the destructors of these structures. In order to preserve methodological rigor in the analysis of political leadership there is a need to distinguish the analysis of political leadership from the analysis of political power. This holds especially true when the same person is involved in both roles.

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